

CITY COUNCIL REPORT
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TO: Mayor and Council Members

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SUBJECT: Open Space, Civic Spaces, Viewsheds, and Buffers

City Council requested information on the Zoning Code and Regional Plans definitions, requirements, goals and policies in regard to open spaces, civic spaces, viewsheds, and buffers.

Discussion

Zoning Code

The Zoning Code provides the following definitions in regard to Buffers, Civic Space, and Open Space. The Zoning Code does not include a definition of Viewsheds.

Civic Space: An outdoor area dedicated for civic activities.

Buffer: An area of land with natural or planted landscaping intended to visually and physically separate buildings, uses, or lots from each other.

Open Space: Any undeveloped space or area characterized by great natural scenic beauty or whose existing openness, natural condition, or present state of use, if retained, would maintain or enhance the conservation of natural or scenic resources.

Open Space, Common: The minimum amount of open space area within a development intended or reserved for the use and enjoyment of all owners and occupants, including but not limited to areas set aside for resource protection, passive and active recreation, gardens, and landscape areas.

Open Space, Private: The minimum amount of private open area required with each unit provided as outdoor yard areas, patios, decks and balconies, but excluding stairs, entrance decks, and/or landings. Does not include setbacks; see “Setback.”

No definition for **Viewshed**

The Zoning Code requires the provision of buffers from one development site to another through the use of setbacks (distance between a structure and the property line) within the varied zoning districts and required landscape buffers. Some zoning districts allow minimal setbacks, however, landscape buffers are still required to be met. The required setbacks for the Medium Density Residential zone for example are as follows:

| | |
|------------------------|-----|
| Front | 10’ |
| Interior Side | 5’ |
| Exterior Side (Corner) | 5’ |
| Rear | 15’ |

Development projects within the Medium Density Residential (MR) or High Density Residential (HR) zones or any project utilizing the Planned Residential Development (PRD) option in any zone are required to provide a minimum of 15% the gross development site as common open space. The open space required can include features such as roof decks and courtyards, however, all development sites are required to have at least one common open space area that is at least 400 square feet with the dimensions no less than 15 feet by 15 feet. A development site with more than 50 dwelling units is also required to provide a minimum of 5% of the gross development site as civic space. The following are the specific standards required for open spaces and civic spaces within a development site.

10-30.60.90 Open Spaces, Civic Spaces, and Outdoor Public Spaces

A. Applicable to All Zones.

1. **Location.** Open spaces, civic spaces and outdoor public spaces shall be located to:
 - a. Be shared by adjoining buildings, to the maximum extent feasible;
 - b. Visually or physically connect with open space on adjacent properties;
 - c. Connect the entrances of multiple buildings on a site;
 - d. Integrate and preserve natural features to the maximum extent feasible;
 - e. Orient to views of activities, architectural landmarks, or natural features to provide visual interest;
 - f. Enhance existing vegetation and landscaping, particularly mature ponderosas;
 - g. Preserve and/or enhance major drainage ways; and
 - h. Include site and regional stormwater detention facilities, when such facilities are designed as an integral component and amenity.

2. **Design.** In order to create user-friendly spaces and to encourage use by the public, open spaces, civic spaces and other public spaces shall incorporate all of the following features to the maximum extent feasible:
 - a. Plan site drainage to lead runoff away from active use areas;
 - b. Orient open space to face south and west for solar access to extend its use throughout the year;
 - c. Create a sense of enclosure for outdoor seating areas with landscaping, topography, and/or buildings and structures;
 - d. Create a consistent palette of streetscape furnishings, such as benches, landscaping, shelter, and trash receptacles;
 - e. Locate streetscape furnishings in clusters or nodes;
 - f. Incorporate low impact development (LID) standards in areas that are conducive to LID; and
 - g. Minimize grading and land disturbances.

B. Applicable to Non-Transect Zones. The following standards are additional standards that apply in non-transect zones.

1. Civic or Public Space Requirement.

- a. Nonresidential developments larger than 20,000 square feet in gross floor area shall provide a minimum of five percent of the site as an outdoor pedestrian amenity space that serves as a transition space between a parking area and the entrance(s) to a building. This outdoor pedestrian amenity space may include a landscape oasis area as defined in Section [10-50.60.050\(C\)](#), Oasis Allowance, structures providing protection from the weather, benches, tables, or other pedestrian friendly features.
- b. Residential developments with 50 or more dwelling units shall provide a minimum of five percent of the site in civic spaces that are either privately held and open to the public or publicly owned and set aside as a civic space. Appropriate civic types are established in Chapter [10-70](#), Specific to Civic Spaces.

The Zoning Code does not include provisions for the preservation of Viewsheds. Goals and policies in regard to viewshed protection are contained within the Regional Plan as discussed below. Staff is working with the Conservation Study Forum (a group formed to support the development of the Regional Plan) which has proposed preparing a viewshed analysis for Flagstaff and drafting guidelines for the preservation of those viewsheds.

Regional Plan 2030

The Regional Plan provides the following definitions in regard to Civic Space, Open Space, Scenic View, Viewsheds, and Vistas. The Regional Plan does not include a definition of Buffer.

Civic Space - an outdoor area dedicated for public activities.

Open Space - undeveloped or minimally developed lands that have been designated to remain undeveloped, be preserved to protect natural resources, serve as a buffer, and provide opportunities for recreation that requires no facilities. Such recreational uses include walking, trail running, biking, photography, and sitting quietly. Open spaces differ from parks in that open spaces do not have the developed facilities that are traditionally associated with city parks, such as stadium-style lighting, bleachers, playground equipment, and competitive sports fields.

Scenic Views, Viewsheds, and Vistas – include open hillsides and natural watercourses.

Viewshed - an area of land that is visible to the human eye from a vantage point with particular scenic value that may be deemed worthy of preservation against development or other change.

The following are excerpts from the Regional Plan in regard to buffers, open space and viewsheds.

Natural Quiet

“Just steps from Flagstaff’s urban core, one can leave the commotion of the city and walk into forested serenity or vast open spaces. This convenient and quick access to nature is one of the many reasons people live in and visit Flagstaff. As development occurs on the urban fringe and visitor and recreation traffic increases, maintaining a naturally quiet surrounding environment is paramount. Future development should address noise issues through land use and site planning that appropriately locates intensive land uses and includes **buffers** between uses and highway corridors.”

Open Space

“Open space is a complex mosaic of undeveloped, or minimally developed lands, with a wide variety of qualities, values, and purposes, which affects all other components of the Flagstaff Regional Plan. The area encompassed by the Flagstaff Regional Plan holds enormously diverse open space from high elevation wetland meadows to nationally significant geologic formations. Planning for open space can ensure preservation of these important resources.

While open space conservation is a goal set forth in the Flagstaff Regional Plan, the intent is not to take away development rights that currently exist. This discussion of our open space resources merely highlights the important ecological and sensitive features of our community and offers tools that can be used to conserve our unique resources.

Open space planning also takes the proximity and edge characteristics of the five categories into consideration because such spatial relationships affect the quality of the more natural open space categories.

Primitive—exhibits natural conditions with little evidence of current human activities.

Semi-primitive—shows some evidence of past human activities but retains substantially natural-appearing conditions; access is restricted and the area serves as key or high-quality wildlife habitat.

Multiple-use/Conservation—appears natural but shows some evidence of past human activities; often accessible by two-wheel drive vehicles with moderate to high levels of use.

Neighborhoods—open spaces near residential areas that are easily accessible for after-work recreational activities such as hiking, biking, or horseback riding; highly accessible with a high level of use.

Cultural/Historical/Recreational—highly modified by human facilities, including developed recreation sites and a combination of natural and modified landscapes.”

Vistas and Viewsheds

“Natural scenic beauty supports a number of important community elements, including the natural environment, quality of life and character, and local economies. The Flagstaff region is known for its scenic vistas, which contain relatively large natural areas. Residents come to love these landscapes, although we often take them for granted. Without proactive measures, roads, housing, and commercial buildings can threaten the pristine nature of these areas and diminish many of their positive benefits. The Flagstaff Regional Plan promotes a variety of strategies to protect scenic viewsheds by managing the amount and character of development, including regulating the type and intensity of development, design requirements, landscaping, and more.”

The following are goals and policies in the Regional Plan that address buffers, viewsheds, open space and civic space.

Goals & Policies addressing buffers

Policy LU.3.3. Protect sensitive cultural and environmental resources with appropriate land uses and buffers.

Goals and Policies addressing viewsheds

Policy CC.1.6. Encourage cluster development to preserve open space, viewsheds, and scenic vistas

Policy: CC.4.9. Develop appropriate tools to facilitate the undergrounding of existing overhead utility lines, especially in established viewsheds and in reinvestment areas.

Policy LU.2.2. Design new development to coordinate with existing and future development, to preserve viewsheds, strengthen connectivity, and establish compatible and mutually supportive land uses.

Policy LU.19.3. Enhance the viewsheds and frame the view along the corridors through design.

Goals and Policies addressing open space

Policy E&C.7.2. Favor the use of available mechanisms at the City and County level for the preservation of environmentally sensitive lands, including but not limited to public acquisition, conservation easements, transfer of development rights, or clustered development with open space designations.

Policy E&C.10.3. Protect sensitive and uncommon habitats such as ephemeral wetlands, riparian habitats, springs and seeps, rare plant communities, and open prairie ecosystems including the physical elements such as water sources and soil types on which they depend through open space acquisition efforts, avoiding these features in the design of subdivisions and other development, etc.

Policy OS.1.1. Establish a Conservation Land System supported by stakeholders (federal, state, city, county, non-profit, and interested citizens) to inventory, map, update, and manage the region's green infrastructure including open space planning, acquisition, conservation, protection, and long-term management and maintenance.

Policy OS.1.2. While observing private property rights, preserve natural resources and priority open lands, under the general guidance of the Flagstaff Area Open Space and Greenways Plan and the Natural Environment maps.

Policy OS.1.3. Use open spaces as natural environment buffer zones to protect scenic views and cultural resources, separate disparate uses, and separate private development from public lands, scenic byways, and wildlife habitats.

Policy OS.1.4. Use open space as opportunities for non-motorized connectivity, to interact with nature, and to enjoy the views and quiet.

Policy OS.1.5. Integrate open space qualities into the built environment.

Policy WR.5.7. Support healthy watershed characteristics through implementation of practices, consistent with the City of Flagstaff Low Impact Design Manual, that improve flood control and flood attenuation, stormwater quality, and water sustainability; increase groundwater recharge; enhance open space quality; increase biodiversity; and reduce land disturbance and soil compaction.

Policy CC.1.6. Encourage cluster development to preserve open space, viewsheds, and scenic vistas.

Policy LU.1.3. Promote reinvestment at the neighborhood scale to include infill of vacant parcels, redevelopment of underutilized properties, aesthetic improvements to public spaces, remodeling of existing buildings and streetscapes, maintaining selected appropriate open space, and programs for the benefit and improvement of the local residents.

Policy LU.2.5. Plan Greenfield development within the rural context to encourage formal subdivisions with shared infrastructure instead of wildcat development, and to protect open spaces, and access to public lands.

Policy LU.3.4. Promote transitions between urban, suburban, and rural areas with an appropriate change in development intensity, connectivity, and open space.

Goal LU.5. Encourage compact development principles to achieve efficiencies and open space preservation.

Policy LU.5.4. Encourage development to be clustered in appropriate locations as a means of preserving natural resources and open space, and to minimize service and utility costs, with such tools as Transfer of Development Rights (TDR).

Policy LU.13.9. Use open space and FUTS trails to provide walking and biking links from residential uses to employment, shopping, schools, parks, and neighborwoods.

Policy LU.14.1. Maintain rural growth boundaries to preserve the integrity of open spaces identified in the Greater Flagstaff Open Spaces and Greenways Plan and updates.

Policy LU.14.9. Preserve the rural character, open spaces, wildlife corridors, and neighborwoods at the periphery or just outside of the planning area as defined by the FMPO boundary.

Policy Rec.1.4. Design new or updated public facilities to include parks, open space, and/or recreational opportunities where feasible.

Goals and policies addressing civic space

Policy LU.10.9. Civic spaces must be well designed, accessible, and central to the urban fabric.

Policy LU.11.7. Include new and improved civic buildings and civic spaces into downtown redevelopment strategies. Policy LU.11.8. Maintain and enhance Heritage Square and Wheeler Park as critical civic space for social gathering and community well-being.

Policy LU.13.8. Locate civic spaces, parks, and institutional uses within neighborhood pedestrian sheds.

Policy NH.1.6. New development, especially on the periphery, will contribute to completing neighborhoods, including interconnecting with other neighborhoods; providing parks, civic spaces, and a variety of housing types; and protecting sensitive natural and cultural features.

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